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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000569

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [KIRF](#) [KWBG](#) [TSPL](#) [IS](#) [SY](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: CODEL BAIRD DISCUSSES GAZA, INTERFAITH DIALOGUE,
AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY IN AMMAN

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: During a February 17-18 visit to Amman, Congressmen Brian Baird and Keith Ellison (both members of the Friends of Jordan Caucus) took the pulse of Jordanian feelings on Gaza, talked about interfaith dialogue opportunities, and received an overview of Jordanian science and technology policy. At an Embassy-hosted reception, contacts expressed hope for American engagement on Gaza. During a separate dinner, UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen Abu Zayd outlined the increasing difficulty of delivering aid to the people of Gaza, welcoming Baird and Ellison's stated intention to "bear witness" to the events in Gaza by traveling there. End Summary.

Gaza

12. (C) A reception for the group with civil society leaders focused heavily on Gaza. Contacts voiced impatience with the international humanitarian reaction to events in Gaza, adding that Jordanians were now starting to give up on the peace process. Several stressed the need for change on the ground rather than more rhetoric and promises. There was consensus that the inability of moderate Arab states like Jordan to contain popular reaction opened the door for future political inroads by Islamist political groups. Baird stressed the need for Palestinian unity to move the peace process forward and sideline militant voices. On the sidelines of the reception, Ellison conducted a 30-minute interview with popular Jordanian news web site Ammon News which resulted in an on-line article lauding Ellison and the American political system.

13. (C) During a reception hosted by UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen Abu Zayd, Baird and Ellison announced their intention to "bear witness" to the impact of Israel's operations in Gaza by traveling there. Abu Zayd outlined the overwhelming nature of the challenges faced by UNRWA in dealing with the humanitarian needs of Gazans. She added that Israeli restrictions on aid into Gaza were becoming burdensome, and a large shipment of medicine from Syria was turned away by Israel because the bottles were stamped by the Syrian Ministry of Health.

Interfaith Dialogue

14. (C) During a phone call with Prince Ghazi, the King's primary advisor on religious issues, Baird and Ellison spoke about possibilities for advancing interfaith dialogue under the "Common Word" initiative, which identifies commonalities in the Muslim and Christian scriptures. Ghazi flagged an upcoming Georgetown University conference on the subject and urged the Codel to write a letter to President Obama, asking him to attend. Ghazi also outlined his attempts to formulate a UN resolution declaring a World Interfaith Week -- a cause he hopes to formally launch at the Georgetown conference.

Ghazi plans to accompany the King on a sought-after visit to meet President Obama and hopes to lobby for the President to attend the conference on the side.

¶5. (C) Baird voiced concerns that Judaism was not a part of the Common Word initiative, adding that the cause would be stronger if the common beliefs of three rather than two religions were included. Ghazi responded that Judaism was left out of Common Word due to political sensitivities among Muslims, saying, "It's a tough sell on my side." He understood Baird's concerns, but claimed that it would be a long term project to be pursued through "baby steps" with interlocutors throughout the Middle East. Ghazi pointed out that it was a political rather than religious concern, and as such it would take time to address. He added that the Gaza crisis made the problem of reconciliation "much uglier."

Science and Technology Policy

¶6. (SBU) During a visit to the High Commission for Science and Technology, Secretary-General Anwar Al-Battikhi outlined the framework of scientific research in Jordan. He lamented the decline of the Royal Scientific Advisory Board, which was phased out in 2001, saying that the King "needed more advice" on issues of science, research, and technology. Battikhi asserted that sound advice is especially important on water issues, as Jordan faces the prospect of droughts of escalating severity for years to come. Battikhi voiced his satisfaction with scientific cooperation between the U.S. and Jordan and praised his counterparts in OES for helping to set up working research relationships with American universities.

AMMAN 00000569 002 OF 002

Outlining current projects of the commission, Battikhi spoke of an ongoing survey of mental health services in Jordan which he hopes to broaden into a regional comparative study.

¶7. Codel Baird did not have the opportunity to clear this cable before departing Jordan.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/amman/>
Beecroft